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ABSTRACT

This guide provides a model for guidance needs assessment for elementary school counselors. Following an introduction discussing the lack of appropriate needs assessment instruments for the elementary level, background information on the development of the model instrument is given. The rationale for the verbal, interactive model, which was developed for use in the Lacoochee, Florida elementary school is given, along with results of a 50 student field test of the proposed instrument. The 12 steps for implementing the needs assessment instrument are presented, including the identification of program goals, objectives, and needs, setting needs priorities script development, and classroom implementation. Procedures for data collection and implementation of results are delineated. The 14-item needs assessment instrument is provided, with a timeline for implementation. The guide summary emphasizes the importance of a personal and interactive approach to needs assessment, and concludes with references. (BL)

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A MODEL FOR AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GUIDANCE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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CG 017712

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INTRODUCTION

In many schools today, students are given the opportunity to decide what needs they want their school's guidance program to meet. There is a trend toward needs assessments in educational settings (Kaufman and English, 1979) which includes the field of guidance and counseling (Grobe, Myatt and Wheeler, 1978; Miller and Grisdale, 1975). School counselors in many settings, including elementary schools, have conducted needs assessments with their students. However, while the literature shows that counseling needs assessments have been conducted (Stiltner, 1978; Grobe, Myatt, and Wheeler, 1978), it is still a relatively new field. All of the elementary school guidance needs assessments that the author uncovered were written questionnaires, and only six models assessed the needs of students in the primary grades (Stiltner, 1978; Rimmer and Burt, 1980; Sunshine, 1980; Milwaukee Public School System, undated; Phipps, 1974; and Strubb, 1981).

This lack of appropriate instruments for the primary grades creates a dilemma because many states and school boards recommend a needs assessment component for the purpose of program planning (Grobe, Myatt, and Wheeler, 1978; and Pine, 1975). As mentioned above, only six models assessed the needs of students in the primary grades. Therefore, it seems logical that in order to determine the needs of students in every grade for which the program will be planned, a comprehensive K-5 model should be developed.

The following methods may be used to determine the needs of all students in elementary schools: (1) Counselors can rely on their professional judgment and the judgment of other professionals to determine the needs of their students (Ford, 1965). (2) Counselors can use or model existing needs assessments for the primary grades. (3) Counselors can create a needs assessment (Rimmer and Burt, 1980).

Kaufman and English (1979) believe that it is important to ask the population that is served what their needs are. The author agrees. Adults do not always perceive things the way children do. The author administered a questionnaire entitled, Children's Ratings of the Stressfulness of Experiences, (Yamamoto, 1979 [illegible] to the students and staff at Lacoochee Elementary School. There were twenty items on the questionnaire. Students ranked every item on a continuum from "very upsetting" to "not upsetting". The staff ranked the items the same way based on how they perceived the children at Lacoochee would react. There were several discrepancies. For example, the staff perceived that being picked last for a team and being made fun of in class would be more upsetting than the children indicated (Kelly, 1981). Professional judgment is important in deciding which needs to assess (Rimmer and Burt, 1980), but it is also important to let the students decide which needs they want to have met.

There are also problems with using any of the six assessments that included the primary grades. The author determined that the needs assess-

ments that were reviewed would be too difficult for the students in the primary grades due to some of the following problems: 1. Several assessments had vocabulary that was too advanced for students in the early primary grades. 2. Some assessments used abstract concepts that would be too difficult for the students to understand. 3. Many of the assessments had marking systems that would be too complicated for the students. 4. Finally, all of the assessments were written questionnaires. However, the assessments did not provide examples to help the students understand the items on the questionnaire (Kelly, 1983).

Due to the shortcomings of the needs assessments that were reviewed, the author decided to develop a needs assessment that would eliminate these problems. The author also wanted to develop a needs assessment that could be applied to other elementary school populations.

PROCEDURES

This chapter outlines the development of the author's needs assessment. Information about Lacoochee Elementary School, where the model was tested, is presented. The steps for implementing a needs assessment and the model that was developed are also presented. These steps can be used as a manual for developing and implementing a needs assessment for students in any elementary school population. They are the same steps that the author followed in the development of his pilot needs assessment.

Background

From January, 1979 through December, 1981, the author was employed as the counselor at Lacoochee Elementary School in Pasco County, Florida. Through June, 1981, the guidance and counseling services that were offered were a continuation of the previous counselor's program, and what had been learned in the Counselor Education Master's program at the University of South Florida. However, it seemed that there could be improvement over what was being done. At the conclusion of the 1980-1981 school year, the author decided to conduct a formal needs assessment with the

students. It was hoped that a needs assessment would enable the author to plan the school's guidance program more effectively by considering the students' stated needs.

As noted earlier, a thorough search of the literature was undertaken. Relatively few needs assessment models for students in the elementary grades were discovered. All of these models had vocabulary, concepts, and/or marking systems that would be confusing for many students, especially students in the early primary grades. A needs assessment could have been developed or modeled that would exclude students in kindergarten, first, and second grade; however, the author believed that a needs assessment used for program planning should assess the needs of all students for whom the program was being planned.

Not only did the needs assessment models in the literature present a problem, but the student population of Lacoochee presented a challenge as well. Lacoochee is a low socio-economic rural area in west-central Florida, located about thirty-five miles north of Tampa. Lacoochee Elementary School draws all of its students from this area. The academic performance of these students is below average on the whole. The median stanines on the Stanford Achievement Test have ranged from three to five. The distribution of stanine scores for Lacoochee children is skewed toward the low end -- especially in the primary grades. When children start school at Lacoochee, on the average, they are one year behind, as identified by the Metropolitan Reading Readiness Test administered in kindergarten. Based on the

student population at Lacoochee, the author determined that a needs assessment in the form of a written questionnaire would be too difficult for many of the students.

Developing the Model

Since the author determined that a written questionnaire would be too difficult for many Lacoochee children, developing an alternative form of questionnaire seemed reasonable. But, what would this alternative form of questionnaire be? The most appropriate alternative appeared to be a questionnaire presented orally, in the form of a script, with explanations and verbal participation for each item. This approach was selected for a variety of reasons: (1) This form would not be as difficult as a written questionnaire. (2) The explanations and participation would make this form more understandable than a written questionnaire. (3) The participation would help the children pay attention and stay on task. (4) This form has the potential of being more fun than a written questionnaire. (5) Having the counselor administer the script to all of the students would personalize the approach and make it more meaningful to them. If the counselor is actually present to explain the items and encourage participation, the children can see that the counselor is attentive to their responses.

When the author decided to create a script, he determined the items that seemed appropriate for Lacoochee children, based on the objectives of the guidance program and the goals of the

counselor. These items were placed in a script that was written with language and examples that most of the children could understand. (It would have been easier if the children would have been able to understand terms like "assertiveness training", "conflict management", and "values clarification".)

The needs assessment was implemented with all students during the third and fourth week of classes. However, after the script had been written, the author decided that the task would still be too confusing to many of Lacoochee's kindergarten children. The author based this decision on the academic ability of the average Lacoochee kindergarten student, and the early date when the author would implement the assessment in the the classes. As a result, the needs assessment was used with students in grades one through five. It should be noted that most of the students who were in kindergarten when the needs assessment was implemented during the 1981-82 school year were in first grade at Lacoochee during the 1982-83 school year. The average stanine for Lacoochee first graders on the Stanford Achievement Test during the 1982-83 school year was one.

Field-Test

Due to the search of the literature the author found that when a needs assessment model is developed, it should be field-tested (Rimmer and Burt, 1980; Stiltner, 1978; and Smith and Wilson, 1976). The field-test will help the author determine if the items on the assessment as well as the overall task are understandable. (The

author's assessment was also field-tested to determine if there should be free choice or forced choice of the items.)

Fifty children were selected randomly, ten from each grade. Half of the children were allowed to choose as many items as they wanted. The other half of the group were allowed to choose only five items. The field-testing was accomplished during the first two weeks of classes, thus ensuring that the needs assessment could be administered in the classes during the third and fourth weeks.

During the field-testing the author discussed every item. After every item was read the author would ask at least one of the students, "What does that mean to you?" The other children also had a chance to respond if they wished. Because of this questioning, the author was satisfied that the assessment and the task were understandable for most of the children, and the assessment required only slight modifications.

Student Needs Assessment -- Twelve Steps

The following pages present the steps for implementing a needs assessment for the students at an elementary school. The approach deviates from the traditional written questionnaire approach in which the students read and respond. The author believes that a written questionnaire can be confusing, especially for children in the primary grades. In the author's approach, the counselor reads a script that provides examples, encourages participation, and is written and spoken in language that the

children can understand. The students are only responsible for marking an X next to the number(s) signifying the needs they want help with.

The steps are flexible enough to enable counselors create a needs assessment that is appropriate for the population they serve. Examples from the author's model needs assessment will be presented to assist the readers in clarifying certain steps. Finally, a suggested time-line will be offered to help the reader decide when to implement the steps.

The author's student needs assessment is presented in twelve steps. The most important step is step four. In step four the reader will take the needs and transform them into a script to be presented orally to the students. The script should provide examples and encourage participation on each item. The language should also be understandable to the children. The author attempted to make the language and examples understandable for the earliest grade that would be presented the needs assessment (first grade). (The script was field-tested in order to determine if the language and examples were understandable).

A good script gives the assessment a personal approach, it keeps the students' attention, and allows them to understand the language and examples.

Step 1. The first step in a needs assessment is to determine the goals and objectives of the guidance program, if they are not already stated. (In the author's situation, the guidance objectives were already stated by the Pasco

County School Board). If the guidance goals and objectives are not stated, they can be determined by the following methods: (1) a guidance planning committee; (2) an informal survey of school personnel; (3) the goals and objectives of the counselor; (4) any combination of these methods.

Step 2. When the program objectives are determined, the needs related to these objectives must be established. The methods suggested in Step 1 for determining the guidance goals and objectives can be utilized to determine what these needs are. Also, other counselors can be consulted during this step. However, the counselor who is creating the needs assessment should take an active role. The counselor's knowledge of the school and the students is essential in determining the needs.

Step 3. After the needs are established, it is important to rank them in order of importance and then limit their number. The author believes that too many needs will make the assessment confusing for the children. In the author's model needs assessment, there were twelve needs for grades one and two, and fourteen needs for grades three through five.

Step 4. When the number of needs is determined, the counselor is ready to create the script. The script should provide examples, encourage participation, and be written in language that the children can understand.

Step 5. After the script is written, it should be field-tested with randomly selected students from each grade. Interaction with studetns during the field-testing will enable the creator of the needs assessment to determine if the items are understandable. The individual who is creating the needs assessment should ask the children, "What does that mean to you?" If any items are not understandable, different language (or examples) should be tested until the items are as understandable as possible.

Step 6. As a result of the field-testing, the script should be modified if necessary.

Step 7. When steps one through six are completed, the counselor may implement the assessment in the classrooms. It is important to be structured and task-oriented when implementing the assessment in the classrooms. Explain to the students what is being done, and why it is being done. It is also helpful to have the answer sheets face down on the students' desks until it is time to mark them. This technique will decrease the possibility of the students marking their answer sheets prematurely.

The author's answer sheets are numbered (one number for each need) with a blank next to each number. Students are to mark an X next to the number(s) for the item(s) they want to learn about. It is important to keep re-

minding students to mark only the items they want to learn about. If the counselor is using a forced choice approach, it is important to remind the students that they only can choose a certain number (e.g., five).

Step 8. After the assessment has been presented in every classroom, the counselor should tabulate the results for each grade separately. The needs of the students will vary from grade to grade. The results should be tabulated separately for each grade.

Step 9. Once the results have been tabulated, it is important to find strategies to meet these needs. Excellent sources for finding strategies are kits, journal articles, other counselors, and one's own resources.

Step 10. When Step 9 is completed, the counselor should make an annual plan for guidance. This plan should be based on the needs for each grade and the strategies to meet those needs.

Step 11. After the annual plan has been made, the counselor should implement the plan with the students. It is important to give feedback to the students. They should be informed that the strategies that are being used are based on the needs assessment.

Step 12. The final step is evaluation. Toward the end of the school year, the students should be given the chance to evaluate the guidance program. The evaluation can also help the counselor plan for the following school year.

Model Needs Assessment Instrument

The following is a copy of the author's model needs assessment as implemented in Step 7. The reader should keep in mind that this assessment is based on the goals and objectives of the author's guidance program and is based on his school's population. The goals and objectives may change from counselor to counselor, program to program, and population to population. The model is intended as a guideline for comparison.

When both field-testing and administering the script, it is important to be structured and task-oriented. First, answer sheets should be handed out, instructing students to keep them face down. The task and the purpose of the task should be explained. Students should be informed the counselor is going to talk about all of the items, and that they should choose the items that they want to learn about.

After the answer sheets have been passed out and the task has been explained, the counselor may present the script to the students. The script should be presented in the following four steps:

(1) Give an overview of each item.

(2) Explain each item in detail while encouraging participation to help the students understand the items.

(3) Go over the items so the students can mark the ones that they want to learn about.

(4) Present the overview of each item again so the students can check if they marked the correct items.

Steps one and two will now be presented in greater detail followed by an explanation of steps three and four.

Step One -- Overview

The following is the first phase of the script to be read to the students.

1. "Number one is about jobs. If you want to learn about the different jobs that people have, that is what number one is about."
2. "Number two is about getting people to like you. If you want to learn how to get people to like you, that is what number two is about."
3. "Number three is about why you like some things, and why you don't like some things. If you want to learn why you like some things and don't like some things, that is what number three is about."
4. "Number four is about speaking up for yourself. If you want to learn how to say what you want and speak up for yourself in a helpful way, that is what number four is about."
5. "Number five is about feeling good about yourself and liking yourself. If you want to learn to feel good about yourself and like yourself, that is what number five is about."
6. "Number six is about stopping from getting mad. If you want to learn how to stop getting mad, that is what number six is about."

7. "Number seven is about stopping from getting in trouble. If you want to learn how to stop from getting in trouble, that is what number seven is about."

8. "Number eight is about how you choose things (or decide what you want to do, or make up your mind). If you want to learn how to choose things, that is what number eight is about."

9. "Number nine is about parents who don't stay together. If you want to learn why parents don't stay together, that is what number nine is about."

10. "Number ten is about stopping from worrying. If you want to learn how to stop from worrying, that is what number ten is about."

11. "Number eleven is about why people act in different ways. If you want to learn why people act in different ways, that is what number eleven is about."

12. "Number twelve is about feelings. If you want to learn about feelings, that is what number twelve is about."

12. *"Number twelve is about relaxing. If you want to learn how to make your body relax, that is what number twelve is about."

13. *"Number thirteen is about death. If you want to learn about death and how people feel about it, that is what number thirteen is about."

14. *"Number fourteen is about handicapped people. If you want to learn more about handicapped people, that is what number fourteen is about."

* These items were only presented in grades three - five.

Step Two -- Explanations

After the overview of the items, explain each item to see if everyone understood the item.

1. "Moms and dads work different places and do different things. If I were to ask all of you where your mom and dad worked, then we would hear a lot of different jobs and places where people work." (Ask several students where their mother or father works.) "I just asked some of you, 'Where does your mom or dad work?' and I heard a lot of different answers. There are many different jobs that people do. If you want to learn about the different jobs that people do, that is what number one is about."
2. "How many of you like having friends?" (Hands) "How many of you want people to like you?" (Hands) "What can you do to get someone to like you?" (Responses) "If you want to learn how to get people to like you, that is what number two is about."
3. "How many of you like chocolate ice cream best?" (Hands) "How many of you like vanilla best?" (Hands) "How many of you don't like spinach?" (Hands) "You see, not everybody likes the same things, and not just in food. How many of you like to go outside after school?" (Hands) "Watch TV?" (Hands) "Do homework?" (Hands) "I see that a lot of you like different things. If you want to learn why you like

some things and why you don't like some things, that is what number three is about."

4. "Do you sometimes have a hard time saying what you want?" (Hands) "Maybe someone bothers you and you want to ask them to stop. Or maybe you want to ask somebody that you don't know to play with you. If you feel scared when you ask for things, then you may want to learn to speak up for yourself. How many of you act this way or know somebody who does?" (Hands) "When people don't say what they want, how do you think they feel?" (Responses) "How many of you know somebody who tells people what they want, or takes things?" (Hands) "How does this make other people feel?" (Responses) "People like this may need to learn to ask for what they want in a nice way. If you want to learn how to speak up for yourself and say what you want in a nice way, that is what number four is about."

5. "How many of you have ever been told that you're no good, or that you can't do anything right?" (Hands) "How many of you sometimes think that you're no good or can't do anything right?" (Hands) "It seems that sometimes you don't feel good about yourself. That's not a good feeling, it it? If you want to learn how to like yourself and feel good about yourself, that is what number five is about."

6. "Raise your hand if you get mad. What do you do when you get mad?" (Responses) "Do you like what happens to you when you get mad? If you want to learn how to keep from getting mad that is what number six is about."

7. "Do any of you get in trouble at school or home?" (Hands) "Some people get in trouble for talking out of turn, talking back, or not doing their work. What do you get in trouble for?" (Responses) "What happens to you?" (Responses) "Do you like what happens when you get in trouble? If you want to learn how to stop getting into trouble, that is what number seven is about."

8. (Get a volunteer and use an example like: " What are two foods that you like? Two games you like to play? Two TV shows you like to watch?") "Pretend you have to choose one or the other. How do you make up your mind?" (Use as many volunteers as it takes until you think the concept is understood). "If you want to learn how to choose things or make up your mind), that is what number eight is about."

9. "How many of you know kids whose parents don't live together? (Hands) "When parents don't live together, they are divorced or separated. If you want to learn why parents don't stay together, that is what number nine is about."

10. "Raise you hand if you worry about things. Some people worry about homework or tests; some people worry about going to the principal or getting punished; some people worry about getting hurt. What do you worry about?" (Responses) "If you want to learn how to stop worrying, that is what number ten is about."

11. "How many of you have seen somebody take something from someone on the playground like a hat, a ball, a toy, etc.?

When that happens, what are some things that kids do about it?" (Responses - fight, hit, call names, yell, cry, tell on them, etc.) " So, people act in different ways when things happen to them. If you want to learn why people act in different ways, that is what number eleven is about."

12. "How many of you feel happy sometimes?" (Hands) "Sad?" (Hands) "Mad?" (Hands) "All of you have a lot of feelings that you feel every day. If you want to learn about your feelings, that is what number twelve is about."

12. *"Sometimes your body gets nervous and tense and your muscles get tight. Does this happen to you?" (Hands) "If you want to learn how to relax your muscles, that is what number twelve is about."

13. *"How many of you have known someone that has died?" (Hands) "How many of you had a pet die?" (Hands) "How did you feel when they died?" (Responses) "If you want to learn more about death and how people feel about it, that is what number thirteen is about."

14. *"How many of you know what it means to be handicapped?" (Get an acceptable definition). "How many of you have ever known or seen a handicapped person?" (Hands) "Did you know that (list of famous people) are (or were) handicapped? Do you ever wonder about how they feel or how they do things? If you want to learn more about handicapped people, that is what number fourteen is about."

* Items presented only in grades three - five.

Step Three -- Marking The Answer Sheet

After the explanations are complete, have the studens turn over their answer sheets. The items should be covered in this manner: "Number one. Moms, dads, and other grown-ups work different places and do different things. If you want to learn about the different jobs that people do, put an X next to number one. If you don't want to learn about different jobs, then leave number one blank." All of the items should be covered. If time permits, the overview should be covered so the children can make sure that they chose the correct items.

Time-Line (See Figure 3.1)

If the goals and objectives of the guidance program are not already stated, they should be determined before the needs assessment procedure begins. The beginning of the school year is the logical time for assessing the needs of the students, so the goals and objectives should be detrmined prior to this time. The optimal time for determining the goals and objectives of the guidance program would be in the spring, before the creation of the needs assessment. However, the goals and objectives could be determined at the beginning of the year, before the students return to school.

There are several steps in the student needs assessment that cannot be accomplished before the students begin classes. Those

Figure 3.1 Sample time-line for implementing a needs assessment

Week Number	Latest dates for completing steps
Planning week	
Student week 1	Steps 1 - 4
Student week 2	Steps 5 - 6
Student week 3	
Student week 4	Steps 7 - 8 (Steps 9 & 11)
Student week 5	
Student week 6	Step 10
Student week 7	
Student week 8	
Student week 9	
Student week 10	
Student week 11	
Student week 12	
Student week 13	
Student week 14	
Student week 15	
Student week 16	
Student week 17	
Student week 18	
Student week 19	
Student week 20	
Student week 21	
Student week 22	
Student week 23	
Student week 24	
Student week 25	
Student week 26	
Student week 27	
Student week 28	
Student week 29	
Student week 30	
Student week 31	
Student week 32	
Student week 33	
Student week 34	Step 12
Student week 35	
Student week 36	

that may be accomplished include: determining the program goals and objectives (Step 1), determining the needs that are related to the progam goals and objectives (Step 2), limiting the number of needs (Step 3), and creating the script (Step 4). The counselor can satisfy these four steps before the students begin school, or at the end of the students first week at the latest.

When the students have returned to school (and after steps one through four have been satisfied), it is essential to field-test the script (Step 5) and modify the script if necessary (Step 6). Steps five and six should be accomplished no later than the students' second week in school. After these steps are met, the counselor will be ready to present the needs assessment in the classrooms (Step 7) and tabulate the results (Step 8). These steps should be accomplished no later than the students' fourth week in school.

The annual plan (Step 10) should be created by the end of the students' sixth week. Finding strategies to meet the expressed needs of the students (Step 9) and implementing the annual plan (Step 11) will be accomplished throughout the school year. The final step, evaluation (Step 12), should take place within the last six weeks of the school year.

Summary of the Administration of the Needs Assessment

The preceeding steps, needs assessment, and time-line have been presented to assist the reader in creating a needs assessment instrument to use with the students at an elementary school.

The author's needs assessment is intended as a guideline on which to model other assessments. It is important to remember that the needs assessment presented in this paper is based on the goals and objectives of the author's guidance program. It is unlikely that another program would have identical goals and objectives. Thus, the sample assessment itself should not be copied, its format should be modeled. This does not mean that counselors cannot use any of the same items on their needs assessment instrument. However, counselors should remember to field-test all items before the assessment is finished, even if the item is from the author's assessment. If students at the author's school understood an item, that does not necessarily mean that the item will be understood at another counselor's school.

In short, a needs assessment should be an outgrowth of the goals and objectives of the counselor's particular program. However, the counselor's needs assessment should emulate the author's in one major respect: maintaining a personal and interactive approach. The personal and interactive approach is the foundation that makes the model work.

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